

July 18, 2004 by Steve Brandon



Following Hard After God

Psalm 63

I want you to experience, ...

1. A Desire for God (verse 1).
2. A Vision of God (verse 2).
3. The Mercies of God (verse 3).
4. The Worship of God (verse 4).
5. A Satisfaction in God (verse 5).
6. The Thinking about God (verse 6).
7. The Help of God (verse 7).
8. A Commitment to God (verse 8).

Why?

That you would be sustained in the troubles of life.

This morning, I would like to take a close look at Psalm 63. As I mentioned already in our time of worship in song, we began a tradition last year of singing a Psalm in our morning worship service each week in the summer, as we read through the Psalms according to our Bible reading schedule. Last year we sang Psalm 32 every week for seven weeks. This year we will sing Psalm 63. I thought that it would be good for us to spend some time thinking about it before we actually sing through it in weeks to come. It is worthy for us to think about this Psalm. Chrysostom, the early church father, suggested that "no day should pass without the public singing of this Psalm." This Psalm is a personal Psalm. In 11 short verses, David mentions himself 18 times. It is a Psalm of experience. David speaks of his intimate, personal experience with God. I desire that the words of this Psalm might become our words also. Personally, I long to experience these things that David experienced. As a pastor, I long for every one of you to experience these same things. At Rock Valley Bible Church, I know that our tendency is to push experience in the background. We tend to seek God with our minds. I believe that this is a reaction to the feelings-oriented culture we live in. But, if our knowledge never reaches our heart, we've missed the point of God's word. God's word is to be known, so that we might know and experience Him! I want you to hear this Psalm in the way that I believe that David wrote it. We don't know the exact circumstances surrounding the writing of this Psalm. But, I suspect that it took place somewhere in the account of 2 Samuel 15-19, when David was running from Absalom, his son, who had rebelled and set himself up as king by winning the hearts of those in Jerusalem. David was in the wilderness, where water was scarce, and where scavenger animals were the only ones to survive. It was a time when David was forced to depend utterly upon God. It is in that context that I believe he wrote this Psalm. He was relying upon God. He was pleading with God. And he was earnestly seeking God.

Psalm 63

O God, You are my God; I shall seek You earnestly;
My soul thirsts for You, my flesh yearns for You,
In a dry and weary land where there is no water.
Thus I have seen You in the sanctuary,
To see Your power and Your glory.
Because Your lovingkindness is better than life,
My lips will praise You.
So I will bless You as long as I live;
I will lift up my hands in Your name.
My soul is satisfied as with marrow and fatness,
And my mouth offers praises with joyful lips.
When I remember You on my bed,
I meditate on You in the night watches,
For You have been my help,
And in the shadow of Your wings I sing for joy.
My soul clings to You;
Your right hand upholds me.
But those who seek my life to destroy it,
Will go into the depths of the earth.
They will be delivered over to the power of the sword;
They will be a prey for foxes.

But the king will rejoice in God;
Everyone who swears by Him will glory,
For the mouths of those who speak lies will be stopped.

In utter desperation, David totally committed himself to God. I want us to experience these same things. My message this morning will be very pastoral. My outline this morning will be expressions of my heart for all of you. First, I want you to experience ...

1. A Desire for God (verse 1).

This comes from verse 1, "O God, You are my God; I shall seek You earnestly; My soul thirsts for You, my flesh yearns for You, In a dry and weary land where there is no water." I know the imagery that David is describing. For the last two weeks, I have been in a "dry and weary land where there is no water." I've been in California. There is water in California. But, the water is scarce. Everything is dried up, unless sprinklers have come to save the day. We went on a few hikes in the wilderness. As we did, it was important that we took our water since it was dry and hot. As we walked along the paths, our mouths began to dry out. Our throats began to be parched. Our energy began to be zapped by the heat. As these things took place, we would take out our water bottles, and drink to quench our thirst. And oh, what a refreshment it was. That's the imagery here. David says that he is "earnestly seeking." David says that he "thirsts for." David says that he "yearns for." But, it isn't the physical water that he is longing for. His desire is for God.

Sure, David finds himself in the wilderness. Sure, David finds himself thirsty for water. But, he uses these pictures and passions to illustrate the longing and desire of the soul. His soul has a desire for God. The Bible often uses the illustration of hunger and thirst.

Psalm 42:1, 2 - "As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God."

Psalm 34:8 - "O taste and see that the LORD is good."

Isaiah 55:1 - "Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; And you who have no money, come, buy, and eat."

John 7:37 - Jesus said, "If any man is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink."

I want you all to experience a desire for God. I want you all to experience a longing for God. I want your spiritual thirst to be quenched by God. It will be for your blessing! Matthew 5:6 says, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied."

I say this, because this isn't optional to the Christian life. Listen to the words of Jesus, Himself:

"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me, he also shall live because of Me. This is the bread which came down out of heaven; not as the fathers ate, and died, he who eats this bread shall live forever." (John 6:53-58)

A few verses later, Jesus points out that He was speaking metaphorically. He said, "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life" (John 6:63). Jesus said, "You need to have a spiritual longing for My flesh and for My blood." And we long for that through faith and trust in Jesus.

Do you have a desire for God? Do you long to experience Jesus? When your soul is thirsty and withered up, do you seek to quench your thirst by faith in the sacrifice of Jesus? This is what verse 1 is speaking about. It speaks about a man seeking for God. It speaks about a soul thirsting for God. It speaks about a body finding its rest in God alone. I want you to experience a desire for God. I also want you to experience ...

2. A Vision of God (verse 2).

This comes from verse 2, "Thus I have seen You in the sanctuary, To see Your power and Your glory." Though David is fleeing in the wilderness, he brings his mind to think of the temple. It's not so much the temple on earth, but the holy place in heaven, where God sits as king, ruler, and judge over all the nations. As your pastor, I long for you to see God for all that He is. I long for you to get a glimpse of God's power and glory as David saw. Now again, I'm not sure that you should take these words as literal in the sense that you need to see God with your eyes, for the scripture says that "no man can see God and live" (Exodus 33:20). And the scripture also says, "God dwells in unapproachable light" (1 Tim. 6:16). But, I do believe that you ought to try to comprehend what God is really like. It is not enough to know about God. You need to experience Him!

I could go to verse after verse describing God to you and it would be worthless, until you really grasp the reality of God. I could tell you that God created the world by the mere power of His voice (Genesis 1). I could tell you that God spans the universe with His hand (Isaiah 40:12). I could tell you that the creation is simply the fringes of His ways (Job 26:14). I could tell you how all the nations in the world are regarded like a speck of dust on the scales (Is. 40:15). I could tell you of the mighty sovereign power that God still exerts upon the earth. Though He flooded the earth once, He has promised to withhold the rains so that we wouldn't have another such flood (Genesis 9:11, 12). And we haven't had one.

But, until you see Him in your soul, it won't make an impact. You can know everything there is to know about God. But, until you know God, it won't make an impact. Have you ever heard the phrase, "A picture is worth a thousand words"? In some sense, that is true in Christianity as well. A vision of God is worth a thousand sermons. Isaiah saw God and was radically changed. Ezekiel saw God and was his willing

mouthpiece. The apostles saw the risen Jesus and turned the world upside down with their bold preaching. And when you see God for who He is, your life will change as well. Your heart will change, as you experience sins forgiven in Jesus Christ. Your desires will change, as you know that God is the only One you need to please. Your confidence will change, as you know that God is in control of all things.

While David is in danger in the desert, I believe that his vision of God was enough to sustain him in his difficulties. David saw that God's power was greater than the power of Absalom. David saw that God's glory was worth more than his own fleeting glory. A vision of God is capable of sustaining you in your difficulties as well. We sing the hymn,

"When Satan tempts me to despair, and tells me of the guilt within,
upward I look and see Him there, who made an end to all my sin.
Because the sinless Savior died, my sinful soul is counted free,
For God the just is satisfied to look on Him and pardon me."

We are to "fix our eyes on Jesus" (Hebrews 12:2). He will carry you through your difficulties. I want you to experience a desire for God. I want you to experience a vision of God. My third point is that I want you to experience...

3. The Mercies of God (verse 3).

Look at verse 3, "Because Your lovingkindness is better than life, My lips will praise You." David seems to be contemplating his end. He is running and fleeing in the wilderness. He doesn't know if he will live or die. He may die of thirst in the next few days. But, David is certain about one thing. He is convinced that God's lovingkindness is better than life itself. If David were given a choice between living another day without the lovingkindness of God and dying with the lovingkindness of God, it would be a no-brainer. He would choose death. Patrick Henry famously said, "Give me liberty or give me death." David said, "Give me lovingkindness or give me death."

At this point, you might be asking, "what exactly is God's lovingkindness?" It's translated several different ways in different Bibles. ESV calls it, "God's steadfast love." NIV simply shortens it to "love." The basic idea is that of God's faithful, loyal love. God's lovingkindness was best exhibited in the cross of Christ, when God demonstrated His love for us in dying for our sins, in taking the punishment that we deserved, and in reconciling us to God. But, God's lovingkindness continues in that He is faithful to us. Nothing is able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord (Rom. 8:39). God hasn't extended His lovingkindness to us because we deserve it in any way. It is through mercy alone that He extends His lovingkindness to us. When you comprehend all that God has done for you in Christ, you will be able to say with David, "Thy lovingkindness is better than life."

God's lovingkindness lasts longer than our life. It is the reason for our hope in this life. It sustains our life today. It is worth more than our fleeting breath. All of God's saints have always valued God more than life. Why is it that Moses chose "to endure ill-treatment with the people of God, rather than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin" (Heb. 11:25)? It was because Moses considered God's lovingkindness to be better than life. Why is it that Stephen willingly gave up his life, praying for the forgiveness of those who were stoning him? It was because Stephen considered God's lovingkindness to be better than life. Why did those in the early church accept joyfully the seizure of their property by the Roman government (Heb. 10:34)? It was because they considered God's lovingkindness to be better than life. Why is it that Paul could say, "I am ready not only to be bound, but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 21:13)? It was because Paul considered God's lovingkindness to be better than life.

In Philippians 1:21, Paul said, "To live is Christ and to die is gain!" How does this make sense? It is because, "Your lovingkindness is better than life." Do you value the mercy of God in Christ as more precious than your life? Or, are you seeking the pleasures of this life? The only way that you will ever value God's lovingkindness more than your own life is when you experience the mercy of God in your life. It's one thing to say, "Yeah, I'm a sinner." It's another thing to experience your sinfulness to the point that you can cry out in utter desperation, "Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?" (Romans 7:24).

It's one thing simply to say, "Yeah, I'm forgiven." It's another thing to experience the hell that you know you deserve, and to realize the grace of God that gives you the heaven that you don't deserve. In my heart and mind, I am coming to see more and more the preciousness of the work of God in Christ Jesus on my behalf. As your pastor, I want for you to experience the mercy of God in Christ Jesus. I also want you to experience ...

4. The Worship of God (verse 4).

Verse 4 reads, "So I will bless You as long as I live; I will lift up my hands in Your name." David simply gives his pledge to worship God as long as he lives. He says, "God, You are great and I am small. You are worthy and I am not. You are the master and I am the servant. You are sovereign and I am the weakling. I'm the worshiper and You are the One who is worshiped. For the rest of my days here upon this earth, you will find me worshipping You."

Notice that verse 4 flows out of verse 3. It is really a continuation of it. In verse three, David said that he would be a worshiper, "My lips will praise You" (verse 3). Putting these together, you have David saying, "My lips will praise You. So I will bless You as long as I live; I will lift up my hands in Your name." (verse 3b-4). But, don't miss the fuel that energizes the worship. The fuel is the mercy of God. It is "because Your lovingkindness is better than life," that I will be a worshiper of You. When you experience the mercies of God, you will worship God. This is the usual pattern in the Bible: those who receive mercy respond in worship. Mercy, then worship. I thumbed through Acts this week and noticed this pattern often. When Peter came to the home of Cornelius, the Gentile and preached the gospel to those gathered there, those who believed were filled with the Holy Spirit and were "speaking with tongues and exalting God" (Acts 10:46). When Paul brought the gospel to Pisidian Antioch, the Gentiles heard of God's mercy that has come to them and they were "rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord" (Acts 13:48). When the Philippian jailer and his household believed in the mercy of Christ, they "rejoiced greatly" in God (Acts 16:34).

We need to realize that the fuel that energizes worship is the mercy of God! As a result, our church ever needs to keep on the front burner,

the mercy of God in Christ. The cross of Christ is the main thing for our church. We need to work hard to keep it the main thing! As we experience the mercy of God, we will experience the worship of God. Notice the experience aspect of David's worship. He pledges to involve his whole self in it. In verse three, he engages his voice in adoration, "my lips will praise You." In verse four, he commits to a life of worship, "as long as I live." In verse four, he commits his entire body in worship, "I will lift up my hands in Your name." Lifting up the hands is simply an expression of adoration and dependence. The open palm lifted high gives bodily expression of our complete devotion to and dependence upon God.

At Rock Valley Bible Church, we aren't much into the habit of lifting our hands in worship. Perhaps it has to do with the corruptions that often come within congregations that always lift their hands. I have seen the corruptions. I have seen those "worshipping", lifting their hands out sideways and almost bonking their neighbor in the nose. I have seen others lift their hands up whenever the music really starts to pick up. There are many who lift up their hands for the world to see how spiritual they are. But, we ought not to let the corruptions of this practice deter us from the practice. Certainly, many have been corrupt in their prayers, but this ought not to cause us not to pray. Perhaps we aren't into the habit of lifting our hands in worship, because we shy away from experientialism. To be sure, there are many churches who are merely trying to induce a feeling, so that you go home feeling like you have worshiped. I remember being in a worship service that was bilingual. A portion of it was done in Spanish. A portion of it was done in English. At one point, the Hispanic praise band was going at it. Many of us in the congregation didn't know what they were saying, but the music was pretty hip and those playing and singing were really into it. I was talking with a guy at the end of the service, who said, "I didn't understand a thing they said, but boy was that worship!" This is the sentiment of many places of worship today. It's more about feeling than it is about truth. It's more about hip music, hands clapping, and raised hands than it is about truth. You can have hip music, hands clapping, and raised hands at a rock concert, which is idolatry and not worship. But, we ought not to shy away from hand raising simply because it is experiential.

The burden of my message this morning is that I want you to experience God. If your experience of God is genuine, by all means, raise your hands. As a pastor, I want you to experience the mercies of God. When you experience God's mercy, it results in the Worship of God. My next point is that I want you to experience ...

5. A Satisfaction in God (verse 5).

Look at verse 5, "My soul is satisfied as with marrow and fatness, And my mouth offers praises with joyful lips." David is here speaking about soul satisfaction. Again, he employs a metaphor. Before, he spoke about thirst in the wilderness. Here, he speaks about the enjoyment of a rich and tasty feast. Let's get the imagery first. I want you to think about your most favorite meal. Take your diet completely out of the picture. I don't want you to think about that. I want you to think about pure taste and enjoyment. I want for you to cause your salivary glands to start working overtime. Some of you children may be thinking about McDonalds. Some of you adults may be thinking about sirloin steak. Others may be thinking about fresh cooked Alaskan king crab. Now, I want you to think about dessert. Think about quadruple-layered chocolate cake. Think about a triple scoop ice-cream cone. Think about a Marie Calendar's apple pie. Now, I want you to think about all of that for dinner. You have just finished eating. Those delicious foods are now gurgling in your stomach. You finally sit back and take a few breaths, totally satisfied in your feast. Do you know what I'm talking about? Now, take this imagery and translate it into finding pleasure in God. David writes, "My soul is satisfied as with fat and rich food." Just as you love to eat your favorite foods and find your whole body at ease and contentment after you eat, so should you love to find your satisfaction in God.

How many there are who find their satisfaction and joy and contentment in the things of this world, rather than in God. I'm not talking outside the church. I'm talking within the professing church. I'm talking about those who claim the name of Christ. Many attend church services faithfully every week. But would the truth be known, their satisfaction isn't in God and with His people. For these people, church and God are like vegetables. They aren't your favorite. But they are eaten because it's important for their health, and they know this. Consider this, though: there is no craving or satisfaction in eating carrots. Their satisfaction is in their boat, in their cabin, in their computer, in their sports, in their friends, in their television, in their technology, in their job, in their sexual enjoyment, in their politics, in their vacations, in their children, in their shopping, in their intelligence, and in their garden. And so, I ask you, where do you find satisfaction?

I want you to think about the things that you most enjoy. If you could plan your most ideal, most satisfying day, of what would it consist? What would you do? Would God have any part of that day? When you think of God, do you think of the pleasure that you derive from experiencing Him?

John Piper has helped me in this area. He repeats again and again that "God is most glorified in us, when we are most satisfied in Him." I believe that he is right on. God isn't a cruel master to be obeyed whether we feel like it or not. God is our worthy Lord, who has given us good things to enjoy in this life, and who is patient, kind, and loving toward us. We ought to come and worship before God with joy, enthusiasm, pleasure, and satisfaction. When we come to God with an earnestness and eagerness and desire, it is then that God is most glorified, as He is put on display as a good and gracious God.

If you find your satisfaction in God, you will worship God as the One in Whom you delight. You will willingly obey God with commandments that you don't find to be burdensome (1 John 5:3). His word will be your treasure. You will naturally speak of Him to the saved and unsaved. As the chorus sings,

"Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face;
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,
In the light of His glory and grace."

Is this your experience? Do you know anything of this? Or, are you striving, working and longing for that thing that will ultimately satisfy you? Augustine put it well when he said to God, "You have made us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless, until they find their rest in You." It's no wonder that those who seek their satisfaction in their latest toy, computer game, car or house, ultimately find it empty as the novelty wears off. It's no wonder that the world writes songs like, "I can't get no satisfaction, I can't get no satisfaction. 'Cause I try and I try and I try and I

try. I can't get no, I can't get no." But, I'm here to tell you today that you can get ultimate satisfaction only in God. David did (verse 4).

My heart's desire as a pastor is for you to experience this as well.

6. The Thinking about God (verse 6).

Verse 6 reads, "When I remember You on my bed, I meditate on You in the night watches." Meditation is the vehicle of feasting on God. We feed our physical body with food through the mouth. We feed our spiritual soul with meditation in the mind. Just as it is impossible to enjoy a feast without food, so also is it impossible to be fed spiritually without the truth. David is picturing Himself on his bed with his eyes closed. He is picturing Himself up all night, scanning the horizon for potential invaders. During these times, he is thinking about God. You must realize that he couldn't meditate on God, unless he had previously heard or known about God during other times in his life. So also with you. You can't meditate upon God, if you don't know anything about God. This is the importance of reading the Bible. This is the importance of memorizing the Bible. This is the importance of learning the truths in the Bible. We kicked off this year with a sermon on meditation from Psalm 19:14, which reads, "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my rock and my Redeemer." (Psalm 19:14) My outline for that sermon was 1) What is Meditation, 2) How Can I Meditate, and 3) Why Should I Meditate. If you are interested in finding out a bit more about meditation, please read that sermon (which is posted on our web site). I sought to be very practical in that message on how and why to meditate. It is important to meditate.

As a pastor, one of my roles is to feed you spiritual food, that you might be strong. The shepherd will lead his sheep to the pasture, where the sheep can graze. The shepherd will lead his sheep to the waters, where the sheep can drink. And so must a pastor bring food to the sheep. I bring food to you in many ways. On Sundays I teach the Bible formally, as I am doing now. I have worked hard to encourage you to read the Bible through each year. We have a reading schedule in the back (and on our website). I think of another ministry that I have had with the men. For lack of a better name, I have called it, "Read with Steve." The idea is pretty simple. We agree upon a book to read. I write up a weekly schedule of reading through the book. After each weekly reading, I have encouraged the men involved to put out an email to those reading with some of their thoughts on the chapter at hand. The purpose of this ministry is clear. I want men to read books which stir up the truth about God. In so reading, I want them to think about the truth of God, which will stir them to speak about it with others and ultimately unite our church in doctrine and practice. The demand on your time isn't great. Each weekly reading is usually somewhere around 20 pages or so. If you read slowly, this should take you about an hour or so each week. So, if you calculate this out, you can figure about 10 minutes per day. Let me show you how much you can read in 10 minutes per day. Since August last year, we have read the following books: *Spurgeon's Sermons, volume 7. Seeing and Savoring JESUS CHRIST*, by John Piper. *Don't Waste Your Life*, by John Piper. *The Cross*, by D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones. *Grace Unknown*, by R. C. Sproul. Beginning August 8th, we will begin reading another R. C. Sproul book entitled, "Willing to Believe." It deals with the historic controversy over "Free Will." I want to encourage you men to jump on board with this program. Never would I want this to supplant your regular Bible reading. That's primary. But, if you are looking for something to read on top of the Bible, consider joining us in August. Simply tell me if you are interested. I'm going to be ordering the books next week. If some of you wives are interested, ask your husband to read the book out loud to you. But in all of this reading, my goal is to help you all to think and meditate upon God, so that you would find your satisfaction in Him.

I want you to experience, ... 1. A Desire for God (verse 1). 2. A Vision of God (verse 2). 3. The Mercies of God (verse 3). 4. The Worship of God (verse 4). 5. A Satisfaction in God (verse 5). 6. A Meditation on God (verse 6). 7. The Help of God (verse 7).

7. The Help of God (verse 7).

This comes in verse 7, "For You have been my help, And in the shadow of Your wings I sing for joy." The reason why David had such a commitment to long for God and worship Him and find his satisfaction in God, is because God had delivered Him in times past. If indeed David was writing this when he fled from Absalom, then there were several occasions when God had protected him and rescued him from danger. Let's think about a few. When David was a little boy, shepherding sheep, there was an occasion when a lion came upon the flock and actually took one of the sheep from the flock. David rose up and attacked the lion. It fought back, but David prevailed and killed the lion (1 Samuel 17:34-37). The same thing happened with a bear. The bear came and took one of the flock. David rose up and fought with the bear and prevailed and killed the bear. Then, as a young man, David was sent to deliver some food to his brothers, who were fighting with the Philistines in the valley of Elah (1 Sam. 17:17-19). When he found out that this giant, named Goliath, was taunting the armies of the living God, he rose up and defeated the giant with one rock from his sling. David was acutely aware that it was God who had been his help in each of these instances. He said, "The LORD who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine" (1 Sam. 17:37). On another occasion, David was brought in to play his harp to calm king Saul from the evil spirit from God that came mightily upon Saul (1 Sam. 18:10). Twice, Saul picked up his spear and attempted to "pin David to the wall" (1 Sam. 18:11). Twice, David escaped, because "the LORD was with him" (1 Sam. 18:11, 12).

When you read the last half of the book of 1 Samuel, you encounter Saul chasing David throughout the wilderness. But, the LORD protected David and allowed him to escape from Saul's hand. Listen to the testimony of 1 Samuel 23:14, "And Saul sought [David] every day, but God did not deliver him into his hand." David experienced the delivering hand of God.

My heart for you as a pastor is to know and experience the help of God. It's not that I want you to escape some near-fatal car accident on the way home, that you might know the help of God in your life. It's not that I want you to be struck with some near-fatal disease, that God cures you miraculously. Interestingly, there are members in our congregation who have experienced those things. I want you to think back through your life to some clear instance in which you were in danger, but God protected you. I can think of a couple of instances in my own life where this was the case. I can recall several close calls in the cars that I was driving. God's hand of providence has led me to safety. I can recall several falls that I have had (or near falls), in which God has protected me. I can recall illnesses that I have had that God has carried me through. I can recall particular temptations that I have had, where God has strengthened me to overcome.

When you experience the help of God, you will have more confidence to trust Him for the future. This is what David says in verse 7, "You have been my help, and in the shadow of Your wings I sing for joy." David knew that he lived in the shadow of God's wings. He knew that he

was like a little chick under the wings of its mother. He should have no worry. He could sing praise to God, despite the circumstance, which is what this Psalm is all about.

8. A Commitment to God (verse 8).

Verse 8 reads, "My soul clings to You; Your right hand upholds me." The idea that David is putting forth in this verse is that of grabbing on to God and never letting go. This word translated "cling" has the idea of "glue." David pledges to stick closely to God, with the idea of being with Him wherever He goes, and doing whatever He says. God had commanded the Israelites to do this. Consider these texts:

Deut. 10:20 - "You shall fear the LORD your God; You shall serve Him and cling to Him, and you shall swear by His name."

Deut. 13:4 - "You shall follow the LORD your God and fear Him; And you shall keep His commandments, listen to His voice, serve Him, and cling to Him."

The idea is that of following closely. Jacob wrestled with God and wouldn't let Him go until he received a blessing (Gen 32:26). Orpah was willing to leave Naomi and return to her people and her gods. But Ruth clung to Naomi and said, "Do not urge me to leave you or turn back from following you, for where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried" (Ruth 1:14-17). Ruth would be faithful unto death. This word "clings" is used in Genesis, "A man shall leave his father and mother and cling to his wife. And they shall be one flesh" (Gen 2:24). This is David's heart. "Lord, I will cling to You and follow You, wherever you lead. I will be faithful unto death. I'm not letting go.

I love the way in which the King James translates this verse: "My soul followeth hard after thee." It is from this verse that I have derived the title of my message this morning, "Following Hard After God." Indeed, this is what the entire Psalm has been about. David has put forth his heart to follow hard after God. He's seeking God. He's thirsting for God. He's longing for God. He's looking for God. He's leaning upon God's lovingkindness. He's praising God as long as he lives and with his whole being. He's finding satisfaction in God. He's thinking about God. He's trusting God in danger. He's clinging to God. He's following hard after God. This is my burden for RVBC. I long for us to be a people that would follow hard after God! The one thing to remember from this morning is that you remember to "Follow Hard After God."

In all of this, David knows that God is the One upholding him (verse 8). This is so much like the language of Paul who said that he labored more than all of the apostles. And yet, he was very sure to point out that it wasn't him, but the grace of God within him (1 Cor. 15:10). It is the same thing here. Though David is making great efforts to strive after God, in the end, it is God who upholds him.

This is my heart for all of you at RVBC. I long to see this body filled with people who are "following hard after God." How do you follow hard after God? By experiencing a desire for God, by developing a vision of God, experiencing the mercies of God, worshiping God, finding satisfaction in God, meditating on God, with the help of God, and a commitment to God. Now think about the question of "Why?" Why follow after God? The answer is that you would be sustained in the troubles of life. This is what David experienced in verses 9-11. David wrote,

"But those who seek my life to destroy it
Will go into the depths of the earth.
They will be delivered over to the power of the sword;
They will be a prey for foxes.
But the king will rejoice in God;
Everyone who swears by Him will glory,
For the mouths of those who speak lies will be stopped."

David knew that God would protect him and defend him. Those seeking his life would be destroyed (verse 9). Those who live by the sword will die by the sword (verse 10). They will be eaten by the scavengers that he saw roaming the desert with him. Those who put forth lies (like Absalom), will be quieted. God, who will do all of this, tells us "Vengeance is mine; I will repay" (Rom. 12:19). David knew that God would do that. David knew that God would right the incredible wrongs done against him. David's commitment was vertical. "But the king will rejoice in God." Despite the difficulties in his life, David pledges loyalty to his God. David's faithful followers shall follow his example and will exult and give glory to God as well.

If you follow hard after God, you will find sustaining grace in time of need. May we all follow hard after God!

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on July 18, 2004 by Steve Brandon.

For more information see www.rvbc.cc.
